own underclothes.[38] His supporters claimed that he could take charge of the business, 'enduring its heat, shedding his blood', for he was 'a brave man who neither cares what he mounts or what the consequences will be'.[39] He was prepared to risk launching an attack on Qutayba. He made an agreement with the leader of the non-Arabs, Hayyān al-Nabatī, that they would divide up the tax revenues of Khurasan between them. Qutayba was now deserted by all but his immediate family. He called for the turban his mother had sent him, which he always wore in time of difficulty, and a well-trained horse he considered lucky in war. When the horse came, it was restless and he could not mount it. The omen convinced him that the game was over and he abandoned himself to despair, lying down on his bed, saying, 'Let it be for this is God's will.'[40]

The mayhem continued. Qutayba sent his brother Sālih, the one who had been friends with the king of Shūmān, to try to negotiate with the rebels, but they shot arrows at him and wounded him in the head. He was carried to Qutayba's prayer room and Qutayba came and sat with him for a while before returning to his couch (*sarīr*). His brother Abd al-Rahmān, who had so often led the Muslim troops in the most difficult situations, was set upon by the market people (*ahl al-sūq*) and the rabble (*ghawghā*) and stoned to death. As the rebels closed in on Qutayba himself they set fire to the stables where he kept his camels and riding animals. Soon the ropes of the great tent were cut and the rebels rushed in and Qutayba was killed. As so often there were disputes about who actually killed him and about who had the honour of taking his head to Wakī. Wakī ordered the killing of all the members of his immediate family and that the bodies be crucified.

The fury and vindictiveness of the attack on the man who had led the Muslim armies in Transoxania so successfully astonished contemporaries. Persians in the Muslim army were amazed that the Arabs could have treated a man who had achieved so much so badly; 'if he had been one of us, and died among us,' one of them said, 'we would have put him in a coffin [*tābūt*] and taken him with us on our military expeditions. No one ever achieved as much in Khurasan as Qutayba did.'[41] Needless to say, numerous poems were written about the subject, many glorifying the deeds of the tribesmen who killed him. But others lamented the death of a great warrior for Islam, such as the poet[42] who addressed his words to the new caliph in Damascus,

capturing something of the sense of excitement and adventure in the unknown that many of Qutayba's followers must have felt:

Sulaymān, many are the soldiers we rounded up for you
By our spears on our galloping horses.
Many are the strongholds that we ravaged
And many are the plains and rocky mountains
And towns which no one had raided before
Which we raided, driving our horses month after month
So that they got used to endless raids and were calm
In the face of a charging enemy
Even if the fire was lit and they were urged towards it
They charged towards the din and the blaze.
With them we have ravaged all the cities of the infidels
Until they passed beyond the place where the dawn breaks.
If Fate had allowed, they would have carried us
Beyond Alexander's wall of rock and molten brass.

THE TURKISH COUNTER-STROKE, 715–37

The death of Qutayba marked the end of an era in the Muslim conquests of Central Asia. Up to this point, the Arab forces, with an increasing number of local allies, had made general progress. True, there had been setbacks, but the overall pattern had been one of expanding Muslim power and influence. All this was now to change. Part of the reason for this was political events in the Muslim world. After the death of al-Walīd I in 715 three caliphs, Sulaymān (715–17), Umar II (717–20) and Yazīd II (720–24), followed each other in quick succession. Each caliph had different advisers with different ideas about policy on the north-eastern frontier. Constant changes of governor meant that tribal rivalries among the Arabs and resentments between Arab and non-Arab Muslims became much more open and frequently violent. It was not until the accession of Hishām (724–43) that Muslim policy again enjoyed a period of stability and consistency.

But there were other pressures from much further east. We know from Chinese sources that the princes of Soghdia were sending regular embassies to the Chinese court, trying to persuade the Chinese to